2-17-51

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

THE AMPHIBIOUS PEN

WHEN the ball-point pen, which once sold for as much as nineteen dollars and ninety-eight cents and which can now be bought at Woolworth's for a quarter—a markdown of approximately ninety-nine per cent—burst upon the country two months after the end of the Second World War, the writing public was in a highly receptive mood. At nine-thirty on the morning of October 29, 1945, when Gimbel's ("Good old Gimbel's, the plain store for plain people") first placed on sale "the miraculous pen that will revolutionize writing," five thousand people were waiting to swarm through the doors, and fifty extra policemen were hastily dispatched to restrain the throng. Inside the store, where ball-point pens lay heaped in gleaming piles on the counters of two aisles running almost the entire length of the Thirty-second Street side, buying quickly reached the proportions of a stampede. In an attempt to break up the jam, Gimbel's hurriedly set up emergency counters, and during the day, as fresh supplies of pens were rushed here by plane, placed them on sale in other departments. "We took over Umbrellas, we knocked out Clocks, and we went into Silver," a Gimbel's man recalled recently. "Ball-point pens all over the place." The pens sold for twelve dollars and fifty cents apiece, and some people bought dozens. They were guaranteed to write for two years without refilling, to write without leaking not only on the ground but under water and at stratospheric altitudes, and to make a clear impression on from six to eight carbons. By the end of the day, Gimbel's had sold ten thousand ball-point pens—a hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars' worth at retail, representing just about a third of the store's average total daily sales volume at that time. Within a few days, the ball-point-pen fever began to take hold elsewhere. In Miami, proprietors of fruit stands sold ball-point pens to customers who stopped by for a drink of orange juice. Fly-by-night stores opened up in San Francisco to sell nothing but ball-point pens. Dressmakers sold them. They appeared in gas stations, jewelry stores, barbershops, men's-furnishings stores, and highway hot-dog stands. And everywhere they were swept away as fast as they came in. It was, indeed, a pen manufacturer's dream—for all but those who had pioneered in the development of the ball-point pen, and they were beside themselves with chagrin. Someone had stolen their thunder.

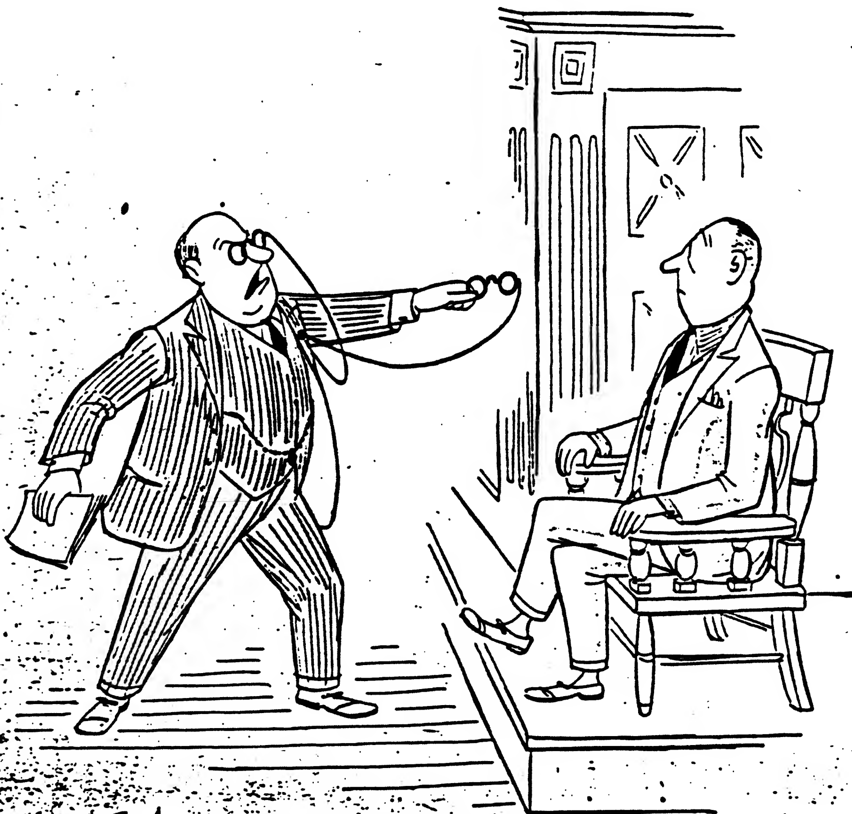
Actually, there was nothing particularly new about the principles of the ball-point pen. During the war, American fliers who had occasion to stop off in Argentina found ball-point pens in the shops there and brought back numbers of them to pass around as novelties among their friends. These pens were the handiwork of Lászlo Jozsef Biro, a Hungarian who had been, at one time or another, a medical student, a painter, a sculptor, a hypnotist, a journalist, and a proofreader. Biro, who felt the need of a ball-point pen after splaying innumerable fountain-pen points on newspaper proofs, made one in Paris and took out a patent on it there in 1939. Shortly afterward, he moved to Buenos Aires, and, in 1943, he interested an English financier, named Henry G. Martin, who had also moved to Buenos Aires, in backing the manufacture of the pen on a modest scale. For this purpose, a company known as Eterpen S.A. was set up, with Martin at its head. The Biro pen differed from conventional fountain pens in three important respects: First, instead of a nib it had a miniature socket that held a ball bearing one millimetre in diameter; second, instead of using ordinary ink it contained a gelatinous dye with an oil base that, rolled onto a writing surface by the ball bearing it at the same time lubricated, dried almost instantly; and, third, it held enough of this unconventional ink to perform for several months without refilling. The special nature of the ink used in the pen also enabled one to write with it

"I didn't sit and sulk at Madison Square Garden."

at high altitudes without the risk of leakage that ordinary fountain pens, because of the effect a change in atmospheric pressure has on liquid, have always been subject to. This particular advantage appealed to the Royal Air Force, whose bomber crews had been constantly plagued by leaky fountain pens. Before long, Martin and Biro farmed out the British rights to a British aircraft company.

In the closing months of the war, the United States Air Force also became interested in the ball-point idea, and sent some of the pens around to various American manufacturers, with word that it might be interested in buying ten thousand or so of them. At this, the three big pen-manufacturing concerns in this country—Parker, Sheaffer, and Eversharp—began looking into the matter of patent rights and discovered that the United States rights had already been acquired by Eberhard Faber, the pencil-manufacturing firm, which had originally planned to manufacture the pen but had run into difficulties. The big companies, and several smaller ones, immediately started dickering with Eberhard Faber for a share in the rights. Martin L. Straus, then president of Eversharp, won out, and in the spring of 1945 two agreements were signed involving Eversharp, Eberhard Faber, and Eterpen. The terms of these were extremely complicated, but in essence Eversharp and Eberhard Faber committed themselves to pay Eterpen a royalty of five and one-quarter per cent on the American sales of the pen; Eversharp and Eberhard Faber bought outright from Eterpen, for a total of half a million dollars, the rights to the pen in the Caribbean and Philippine areas; and Eberhard Faber agreed to share its American rights with Eversharp, while Eversharp undertook to manufacture certain ball-point-pen parts not only for itself but for the pencil company, if and when it wanted any. Straus, who during the war years had been promoting, among other items, a solid-gold pen-and-pencil set priced at a hundred and twenty-five dollars (he sold fifty thousand of them in two years), was delighted with his acquisition and foresaw large profits once certain defects in it had been ironed out. "The original Biro model was a leaker," he said recently. "It skipped, it stuck, it wrote a very fine line, and under certain climatic conditions it didn't write at all. But it was very revolutionary."

Straus turned the pen over to his engineers, instructing them to redesign it with an eye to mass production, and then instituted an advertising campaign to prepare the public for his new "miracle pen," as he described it in one brochure. The campaign was a success. Interest in the pen quickly became widespread. The advertising, which cost Straus a considerable amount of money, was particularly pleasing to Gimbel's, because Gimbel's was just about to bring out its "new atomic-era miraculous fountain pen you've heard about, read about, waited for." As it happened, this pen was not the Eversharp pen, for Eversharp's engineers were still busy at their drawing boards, but one produced by Milton Reynolds, a man who had had no previous experience in the pen business. The coup, which had been very carefully planned, put Reynolds' company in the seventy-per-cent tax bracket within a week.



REYNOLDS, a short, bespectacled, gregarious, globular man with an Elkish buoyancy, a vast gift for persuasion, and a restless instinct for selling things, had first seen the Biro pen in June, 1945, four months before the Gimbel coup. He saw it in a Buenos Aires store during a business tour he was making of South America, and he immediately decided that it was a winner. Although he knew nothing about pens, he knew a good deal about the retail market back home. As president of the Printasign Corporation of America, a Chicago firm that was making, and still makes, a kind of oversize typewriter for turning out display cards for stores, he was in touch with the managers of practically all the department stores in the United States, and he was fully aware that, facing what might well be their first postwar Christmas season, they were harassed by shortages and desperate for novelty gifts that could be quickly manufactured with such materials as were at hand. He had had experience along similar lines in 1944, when, acquiring a batch of silver cigarette lighters in Mexico, he flew them to lighterless American department stores just in time for the peak of the Christmas trade. Reynolds cleaned up a quarter of a million dollars on lighters and then went out of the lighter business. He had long before mastered the art of plunging into a quick deal, and as for the art of pulling out of it at the right moment, his sensitivity had been sharpened over the years by the loss of three fortunes.

Reynolds was born in Albert Lea, Minnesota, in 1892, the son of a threshing-machine salesman. Upon flunking his first semester of high school, he set out for Chicago with the idea of making a million dollars, which he had succeeded in doing by the time he was twenty-six, on an initial outlay of twenty-five dollars, by organizing and running a string

of tire shops specializing in manufacturers' seconds. By the time he was thirty, he had lost his million in the stock market. In 1925, he borrowed some money and headed for the Florida land-boom country, and again became rich, this time as one of the first builders of prefabricated houses, buying parts in New Orleans and shipping them by caravans of barges to their destination. A year later, his second fortune disappeared, along with one of his caravans, its crew, and a cargo of unassembled houses, off the Florida coast during a hurricane. The storm blew Reynolds back to Chicago, where he talked himself into a job as president of a company that sold quotation boards to stockbrokerage houses. He was wealthy again by 1929, when the stock-market crash did him in.

Cleaned out for the third time, Reynolds started prowling the Loop district of Chicago in search of new money-making ideas. On the third day, peering through the window of a small, dusty printing shop, he saw a crude model of the Printasign. Investigation revealed that the proprietor of the shop owned the rights to the machine, and Reynolds talked him into selling them to him on credit. Reynolds made a good thing out of Printasigns and gradually expanded his market as far as South America, but he remained constantly on the alert for what he calls today "the big idea." That was what he sensed he had found when he came across the Biro pen in Buenos Aires, and he hunted up its inventor. Biro told him affably that the American rights to the pen had already been picked up. This information was far from disheartening to Reynolds, for he had learned enough in the business world to be skeptical of the protection afforded by patents. Pleasantly taking his leave of Biro, he flew home with several of the new pens. En route, he wired an engineer he knew to meet him at the Chicago airport. "I wasn't afraid of whatever patents Eterpen might have," Reynolds says. "And something told me I was carrying a million dollars in my breast pocket." As soon as he arrived in Chicago, Reynolds, together with the engineer, headed for the nearest patent library. There Reynolds' casual attitude toward Eterpen's patent rights shortly proved to be, at least in part, well founded. The principle of a pen with a ball point, Reynolds discovered, was comparatively ancient history in this country; a man named John Loud had patented it in 1888, and seventeen years later it had entered the public domain without ever having been exploited. One point covered by the Biro patent, however, was not so easily ignored. This was the matter of feeding the ink evenly onto the ball bearing. Biro had at first tried to do it by regulating the pressure of the ink with a screw at the top of the pen, a method that had previously been patented in Prague by two Czechoslovakians, Paul V. Eisner and Wenzel Klimeš. (Eisner and Klimeš had, in fact, marketed a ball-point pen in Europe for a few years, though with little success; they had also sought to sell the idea of the pen to American manufacturers, with no success at all.) Biro found the pressure-feed system cumbersome and went on to develop a feeder mechanism based on the principle of capillary attraction, and it was this that was used in the pens Reynolds had picked up in Buenos Aires.

After much thought, and a number of long and feverish days in a tumbledown machine shop, during which Reynolds and his engineer designed one ball-point pen after another, they devised a way of feeding the ink to the ball bearing by the simple and unpatentable law of gravity. Then came V-J Day. Reynolds cut his hours of sleep to three. "I knew the pen *had* to be selling by Christmas of 1945 to be a success," he says. "The timing had to be just right. The public wanted a postwar wonder and wanted it then. If the ball-point pen had hit the market one year later, I don't think it would have sold worth a damn."

Reynolds was putting the finishing touches on his gravity-fed pen when he chanced, late one rainy evening, to be sitting in a bar-and-grill scribbling endlessly with it on a damp newspaper. Gradually, he became conscious that, soggy though the newspaper was, the lines of his scribbling stood out clearly. This struck him as peculiar, and, by way of experimenting, he spilled a few drops of water on the tabletop and tried again, with the same result. Returning to his shop, he put a piece of paper on the bottom of a basin of water and drew a line on it with the pen. Again the line was unblurred. That gave Reynolds precisely the sort of promotional idea he wanted, and led to his coining of the memorable phrase "It writes under water." "The object was to make people tell each other what a ridiculous thing it was to boast about," he said the other day. "While they were telling each other that, they were tell-

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ing each other about the pen. The publicity was worth millions."

Shortly after V-J Day, Reynolds sent an emissary with a handmade specimen of his pen to the Office of Price Administration to have that agency set the retail price ceiling then required on new products. "All the other *shnooks* in the pen business thought you just had to write a letter to O.P.A. to get a decent ceiling," a Reynolds man has since said. "Milt is a wonderful opportunist, and of course he wanted to make a buck. The best he thought he could possibly get was a ten-dollar ceiling, but he had the guts to talk them up to twelve-fifty. After all, we had a barrel and a ball, and we could even make it write a little." In the early stages of production, the pen cost Reynolds about eighty cents to make. (Within three years, thanks to improved methods and cheaper materials, it cost about eight cents.)

Reynolds took his sample pen to Gimbel's and came away with an order for twenty-five hundred. Eversharp got wind of the deal, and, according to Reynolds, one evening, in the Stork Club, Straus strolled over to Frederic A. Gimbel, then executive head of the store, and told him he might have a basis for a patent-infringement suit against Gimbel's if it put Reynolds' pen on sale. Today, neither Straus nor Gimbel recalls such a meeting, but Reynolds is sure enough that it took place to call it "the first real break I had." "Eversharp couldn't successfully sue me for using a gravity feed, and they knew it," he says with satisfaction. "Gimbel's turned around and raised my order to fifty thousand pens. That was a total, at the retail price, of six hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars."

Having but one pen on hand and no factory in which to work on filling this considerable order, Reynolds engaged a Chicago manufacturer of machine parts, Titus Haffa, to turn out the component parts of his pen, and engaged three hundred people, among them his wife and daughter, to assemble them in a corner of Haffa's plant. The pens were made entirely of war-surplus aluminum, except for the tip, which was made of brass, and the ball bearing, which was made of stainless steel. The barrel was shaped by precision machines normally used in the making of watch movements. The ball bearing was inserted by hand into the tip, which was then mechanically crimped around it to form a socket with a theoretical clearance between the two of one ten-thousandth of an inch. Next, ball and socket were attached to the barrel, and, finally, the special dye was forced into the pen through the microscopic space between ball and socket. Reynolds began mass production of the pen on October 6th, twenty-three days before the Gimbel stampede. His output that first day was seventy ball-point pens.

THE day after the first pens were sold at Gimbel's, Reynolds received more orders than it seemed possible to him he could ever fill. "It was unbelievable," he said later. "We had only two phones in the Haffa factory, and some people who tried to call us right after the sale opened had to wait five days to get a clear signal. In the Printasign office, a few blocks away, which we used for clerical work, mail orders were piling up by the bagful, and the phones there were completely jammed, too. The only way we could transact business between the two offices was to send a man out from Printasign to a saloon on the corner every hour and have him call a man from Haffa's at another pay phone. The manager of the phone company came down personally to help us out. He put a switchboard in the factory, with a total of twenty-six trunk lines, and people still couldn't get us. Haffa had to ask us to move out."

Reynolds moved across the street, into what had once been an indoor tennis court owned by a vice-president of Marshall Field. It had been used during the war to make parts for Rolls-Royce aircraft engines. The Telephone Company ran fifty lines in there. Purchasing agents from all over the country crowded into the place, holding fleets of taxis outside to transport the merchandise they hoped to buy, and found that they were lucky to get even a handful of pens. One department-store manager who flew in from San Francisco and pleaded unsuccessfully for pens flew on to New York, stood in line at Gimbel's, bought two hundred pens at retail, and flew back with them to San Francisco, where he sold them at the price he had paid. Several would-be purchasers appealed to their senators to help them buy pens from Reynolds. The senators had to wait like the other supplicants to get a call through. "My best friend, C. Gordon Anderson, who is president of the Richards Store Company, in Miami, wouldn't speak to me for two years after, because I didn't answer his wires," says Reynolds. "I didn't even know he had sent any wires. Telegrams didn't mean a thing in that rush." Mail sacks full of orders were piled up halfway to the ceiling in Printasign's offices. One day, a letter containing an order for a hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars' worth of pens tumbled out of one of the sacks. It had been postmarked three weeks earlier. Reynolds sat down in a nearby chair, stared at it thoughtfully, and concluded that one could be a happy victim of circumstances. Gimbel's, which had sold thirty thousand pens, including twelve thousand by mail, in the first week, was urging in its advertising of them, "Write! Phone! Cable! Wire! Come!" By the end of his first month in the pen business, Reynolds, who at the outset had formally organized the Reynolds International Pen Company and capitalized it at twenty-six thousand dollars, had made a net profit, after taxes, of five hundred and forty-one thousand dollars.

By early 1946, Reynolds was turning out thirty thousand pens a day and had eight hundred people working in his factory. (The personnel included three robust girls whose job it was to do nothing but inscribe with the same pen, in shifts, the words "Write on the Ball, Reynolds Pen." The idea was that they were to keep it up until the pen they were testing ran out of ink. The project was abandoned as unprofitable after three thousand foolscap pages had been covered with the slogan, and the girls were transferred to more creative work.) Orders were arriving daily for as many as a hundred thousand pens. Reynolds told his staff to accept orders only from those who would pay cash in advance. During one ten-day period, he deposited checks for more than a million and a half dollars in his bank, all in payment for pens yet to be made. By the beginning of December, he had a backlog of orders for a million pens, valued at twelve and a half million dollars at retail. "It was then that we began selling paper," he says. "The printing press could turn out what the factory couldn't. We printed numbered gift certificates entitling the holder to a pen—strictly in the order of precedence on the waiting list." A hundred thousand dollars' worth of certificates were bought the first day they were offered. By March, 1946, Reynolds had three million dollars in his bank.

Throughout the nation, stationery stores that had managed to get hold of some ball-point pens were becoming targets for burglars. A shipment of ten thousand Reynolds pens disappeared while in the custody of the Railway Express Agency. Two hundred complimentary pens, each marked "I Swiped This from Milton Reynolds," were swiped from his factory and turned up

for sale in a Chicago store. In the tougher districts of several cities, some stores were more or less openly dealing in nothing but stolen ball-point pens. Reynolds installed guards in his plant and a fluoroscope at the entrance, but the underworld had already infiltrated. In all, pens worth seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars were smuggled out of the tennis court piecemeal, including some that one gang assembled in a nearby basement prior to disposing of them in the ball-point-pen black market. Reynolds had expected the demand for ball-point pens to decline after Christmas. Instead, it continued to grow. By February, 1946, Gimbel's ball-point-pen sales amounted to a million and a half dollars and Reynolds had made a profit, after taxes, of $1,558,-607.81. His company statement was audited by Price, Waterhouse & Co., which reported the volume of sales as "substantial."

Almost simultaneously with the production of his first pens, Reynolds brought a million-dollar suit against Eversharp, alleging restraint of trade. His lawyer was Thurman Arnold, the trust buster. Reynolds charged that Eversharp had coerced dealers into cancelling orders for his product. Eversharp denied everything. "Reynolds just brought the suit for publicity, of course, and nothing ever came of it," Straus said the other day. "After he started it, he got together with Carl Byoir, the public-relations man, and Byoir spread the news where every pen dealer could see Reynolds' name. Smartest thing I ever saw. I hired the Byoir outfit myself, later. Naturally, we told our lawyers to bring a countersuit for a million dollars—I don't remember what for. Nothing ever came of that, either."

For almost a year, only Gimbel's had local rights to the sale of the Reynolds pen. Macy's didn't have the pen, and was made to feel it, as Gimbel's advertised triumphantly, "It *would* be Gimbel's (young in heart but old in years, almost 104) that would burst in with this incredible Buck Rogers baby!" Privately, Gimbel's was no less agog. "The ball-point pen captured Mr. Fred Gimbel's fancy the moment he saw it," an executive of the store said later. "A man of amazing imagination and courage, by the way. He snuck the Hearst collection away from Macy's, you know. Well, Mr. Fred made the Reynolds pen his personal baby. There were no other real gift items around in the Christmas traffic of '45. Lots of mink coats at six thousand and up, plus luxury tax, but where were the stores on hosiery? Where were they on white shirts and toys? Frankly, there was too much second-quality merchandise. The ball-point pen was a godsend. Mr. Fred insisted that all the salespeople write their sales checks with the pen. He *hammered* at it."

THE Reynolds firm, in the course of a report on its financial position and prospects, in April, 1946, called attention to "the many advances which Reynolds has pioneered in the development of the ball-point pen" but also noted that purchasers of the pen sometimes let its faults detract from their appreciation of its novel features. "Frankly," the report stated, "one of the problems which arose was the occasional development of a small air bubble in the barrel of the pen which sometimes prevented the free flow of ink to the ball point." Unhappily, this embolismic flaw was proving almost endemic to Reynolds pens. And there were other disorders. Sometimes, when the pen was not gently used, the ball bearing fell out of the point and the ink, called Satinflo, spurted all over, and sometimes the ball bearing became clogged with particles of pigment and wouldn't function at all. Many Reynolds-pen owners found that, even in an unclogged state, the pen would write satisfactorily only when held at an almost ninety-degree angle to the paper. "Other noticeable defects," a pen man recalled the other day, "were skipping and directionality, or faintness of lines in one particular direction, and then there was gooping, too, or the deposition of large droplets of ink. Besides, of course, just plain failure to write."

Because the parts were often fitted together imperfectly, the pen not only gooped, it plainly leaked. Gimbel's salesclerks, who demonstrated the pen in trays of water on the counter, spent much of their time rinsing Satinflo from their hands in trays of a special cleaner conveniently placed under it. Consumers' Research pronounced the ink "a very fugitive dye, so fugitive indeed that it would seem that the greatest usefulness of the pen might be for persons who have reasons for wishing their writings to fade out rather quickly." Reynolds customers, on the other hand, encountered considerable difficulty trying to make the ink fade from their clothing. Many complained that when they carried the pen in an inside pocket, the ink remorselessly rode up in the barrel under the influence of body heat and formed a bubble at the top that burst, with a soft squelching sound, spraying suits, shirts, and underwear. Many owners who had been thus put upon began sending Reynolds their cleaners' bills, and in some instances the damaged clothing itself. Nine times out of ten, the cleaning was a waste of money, for Satinflo proved to be impervious to most cleaning fluids. While Reynolds had guaranteed his pen, he had not guaranteed the clothing of people who wrote with it. Nevertheless, as a good-will measure, he paid the cleaners' bills and, at his own expense, turned the ink-stained clothing over to an enterprising Chicago cleaner who made a specialty of removing spots of Satinflo with a fluid of his own devising. The treated clothing, neatly pressed, was returned to the aggrieved customers. Reynolds' bills from this cleaner for a time amounted to several hundred dollars a week.

Cleaners' bills and ink-stained clothes were not the only things disgruntled customers sent to Reynolds. Defective pens began coming back to him at a brisk rate. Reynolds says that during the first eight months of production he replaced 104,643 faulty pens, including a considerable number ungraciously returned to him by people to whom he had presented them as gifts. "We sincerely tried to improve the pen," he says. "The sad fact is that by the time we got the bugs out of it, it was time to get out of the pen business."

Other pen manufacturers were denouncing the upstart pen. "Take a look at the Constitution of the United States. You can't get that variety of signatures with a ball," a representative of Waterman sneered in an interview with the press, apparently unaware that his firm was presently to bring out a ball-point pen of its own. The press also reported that Parker, which has never brought out a ball-point pen, had called the Reynolds "the only pen that will make eight carbons and no original." Straus, who was still discarding one laboratory model of his pen after another, said nothing. He was not feeling very happy about either the Reynolds pen or the fact that Macy's had got hold of some original Biro pens from a South American distributor and was advertising them as "the same pen people have been talking about, asking for." Since these pens were imported, Macy's was not prevented by the O.P.A. from asking what it wanted for them, which it did—nineteen-ninety-eight.

Meanwhile, a number of new,

smaller companies were mushrooming up to manufacture their versions of the ball-point pen, some of which very closely resembled Biro's. "Everybody started infringing on our patents," Straus says, "because they were under the impression that Reynolds had infringed on them and that if he could get away with it, *they* could. Unfortunately, *he* hadn't." Straus yearned to sue the offenders, but was dissuaded from doing so by the galling realization that if he succeeded in putting them out of business, he would be handing Reynolds a monopoly. Eventually, Straus partially solved the problem by granting several of the manufacturers he suspected of infringement licenses to make ball-point pens under the Eterpen patents. One such concern was on the West Coast. "I went out to this small infringer to tell them I was going to sue," Straus says. "When I got there, I found they were turning out the best ball-point pen I had ever seen, so I made a deal under which they would manufacture the pen for Eversharp. It came out as one of our later models and sold in the millions."

LATE in April, 1946, Eversharp finally got around to putting its own version of the Biro pen, called Eversharp CA (for "capillary attraction"), on the market. It had been a long, slow birth. As early as the previous May, the company had heralded the pen's arrival with a cocktail party for the press in the St. Regis, at which Ann Sheridan autographed a fan's glove with one of the pens, to prove its versatility; a small boy pounded another through a block of wood with a hammer, to prove its sturdiness; Eversharp scientists sealed a third in a vacuum jar, to prove that it wouldn't leak at an altitude of fifteen thousand feet, and then tossed it into a container of dry ice to prove that it would withstand subfreezing temperatures; and a Powers model posed with an eight-foot replica of the Eversharp CA in her arms, to prove that a Powers model can do anything. Two hundred complimentary pens were handed out to the press along with the cocktails. Everything was very festive, but after the party, things bogged down in a morass of renewed difficulties with design and manufacture.

The Eversharp people had planned to undercut Reynolds by selling their pen for ten dollars, but when they at last saw it coming off the assembly line, they decided that it looked more expensive than his and set its price at fifteen. Reynolds was ready for the new arrival. On the day it appeared on the counters, he brought out a new model of his own pen and threw a cocktail-and-luncheon party at the Waldorf to introduce it. It was called the 400 and, unlike both his original model and the Eversharp pen, had, instead of a cap, a retractable protector that slid over the ball point. Girls in ballet costumes posed with the new pens beneath a twelve-foot replica of it. The press received five hundred free 400s. It was announced that the pen (which cost Reynolds sixty cents to make) would retail, like his first model, at twelve dollars and fifty cents.

The Eversharp pen was available at Macy's and the Reynolds 400 at Gimbel's.

"Be glad you waited for the amazing new Eversharp CA," Macy's exhorted.

"WAIT till you see the new Reynolds '400' pen that needs no cap!" replied Gimbel's.

"The smoothest writing ball-point pen we've ever seen!," cried Macy's. "Reloads with a cartridge in fifteen seconds!" (The Reynolds pen had to be sent back to the factory for refilling.)

"This pen is the most unusual writing instrument of civilized times," shrieked Gimbel's. "A pen without a cap. Sounds fantastic, doesn't it? . . . The new Reynolds is, is, is!"

Macy's guaranteed the Eversharp pen to write "up to" three years without refilling. ("Depending on how much you write," Macy's added, in small type.)

Gimbel's boldly guaranteed the Reynolds pen to write a flat four years.

Macy's silently rebuked Gimbel's by publicly pointing out that *its* salespeople were wearing white gloves while demonstrating Eversharps.

Both pens sold overwhelmingly. "In New York City papers, the pen parade almost took the show away from Spring fashions," *Editor & Publisher* reported. Faced by his first real competition, Reynolds decided to step up his public relations. He began sending free pens to prominent and/or photogenic people here and abroad. He sent the President two hundred, each inscribed "I Swiped This from Harry S. Truman," and he sent lesser quantities of pens to every senator, congressman, and Supreme Court justice, as well as to many bank and insurance-company presidents. He presented the entire French Assembly, and every Ambassador and Minister in Washington, with Reynolds pens. In a single day, he distributed twenty-five hundred pens at a New York convention of the National Retail Dry Goods Association. He established two philanthropic organizations—the Reynolds Hole-in-One Association, which in the course of the next two years gave free pens to four thousand hole-in-one and double-eagle golfers, and the Reynolds Master Bowlers Association, which gave a pen to any tournament bowler who scored two hundred and seventy-eight or over. He offered newspaper editors a free pen for every story their papers carried that mentioned Reynolds pens. Every prominent radio comedian got one, and the promise of another for every joke he broadcast about ball-point pens. Most of the resulting gags, which for a time threatened to choke the air waves, dealt with the under-water aspects of ball-point pens. They reached their climax in a skit in the revue "Make Mine Manhattan," in which a comedian, pen in hand and clad in shorts and undershirt, was pushed into a tank of water by a salesman.

To open up foreign markets, Reynolds flew around the world in commercial airliners. Upon his return, he reported that while shaving over the Atlantic he had closed a deal for a hundred thousand pens with an eager jobber in the China-coast trade; that while changing shirts over the Pacific he had sold another hundred thousand, to two Australian merchants; and that while riding into San Francisco in an airline bus he had taken an order for twenty-five thousand pens from the owner of forty Australian department stores. In all, he brought back orders for half a million pens. By the late summer of 1946, Reynolds pens were being sold in thirty-seven foreign countries, as well as on Pitcairn Island, where descendants of Captain Bligh's mutineers were busily weaving baskets—in lieu of money, of which they have little—to pay Reynolds for a consignment of pens they had ordered. In Hong Kong, the pens were selling for seventy-five dollars in American money and were widely used as a medium of exchange. An explorer back from the upper Amazon reported that he had successfully negotiated hostile Indian territory by handing out ball-point pens to the natives. The pens were blamed for a trade depression in Hiroshima, because of a slump in the sale of writing brushes, one of the principal products of the city.

Back home, Reynolds bought a plane, hired a pilot, and made a flying sales tour of the United States. Frequently, he would be greeted at a municipal airport by the managers of the local department stores, who rushed out onto the landing field waving orders. On a

number of occasions when Reynolds was signing a sales contract, the ball-point pen he was using failed, creating a situation that lesser men might have found awkward. Reynolds never faltered. When a pen failed, he would contemptuously toss it aside and draw another from his pocket, like an arrow from a quiver. As at least one of the pens in his reserve supply was almost sure to be a gooper, if not a leaker, he also ran through a vast number of suits.

A NEW trouble developed. Banks complained that the pens were an invitation to forgers, as the signatures on checks written with them could be transferred to documents by the pressure of a thumb on the script. The Corn Exchange Trust Company of New York warned its branch managers against the pen. On top of this, it became public knowledge that Clarence W. Winchell, then an executive of the New Jersey Treasury Department's Division of Purchase and a man to whom Reynolds had sent a complimentary pen, had cautioned the employees in the five hundred state offices under his jurisdiction not to use ball-point pens, on the ground that the ink was subject to fading. "At first, the complaints were wonderful publicity," a Gimbel's man said recently. "People began wondering what kind of pen it was that made the banks mad, and for a few days our sales improved. But not for long."

Reynolds deployed to Miami to take counteraction. There, in the presence of the press and Ruth Byrd, the Miami Beach Queen of Sun and Fun, he signed a check for a hundred thousand dollars in a tray of water and promised to make it out to some charity if, after the check had reposed for a year in the vault of the Mercantile National Bank of Miami Beach, his signature should be found to have faded. (When the year was up, he retrieved his underwater check. His signature had not faded. Reynolds partisans were jubilant. "People were inclined to overlook the fact that the signature on the check, being locked in a vault, where the light couldn't get at it, couldn't fade anyway," a former associate of Reynolds' has since gratefully observed.)

But the adverse criticism was hurting Reynolds, and in October, 1946, he brought out a new model, called the Rocket and guaranteed to write for fifteen years, or thirty-two miles, nonstop. The Rocket came in "six gorgeous colors—stratosphere blue, atomic red, radar green, jet black, chute silver, and cosmic gold," and sold for three-eighty-five. It cost about thirty cents to make. Reynolds sent one of the Rockets to a lifer at Sing Sing, and Gimbel's put them on sale in forty departments, including Furniture. "It didn't go so well," Reynolds says. "Our net profits dropped to three hundred and fifty thousand dollars a month."

Competition was steadily increasing, too. By the Christmas season of 1946, approximately a hundred manufacturers were turning out ball-point pens, some of them selling for as little as two-ninety-eight. At Gimbel's, customers were returning defective Reynolds pens they had bought for twelve dollars and fifty cents and receiving in exchange new Rockets and eight dollars and sixty-five cents in cash. Macy's responded by offering an allowance of three dollars on any ball-point pen for which the owner had paid at least three dollars and a half, to be deducted from the price of any ball-point pen in stock priced at twelve dollars and a half or more. "Do you own a horse and buggy ball-point pen?" Macy's asked in an advertisement. Gimbel's retorted the next day, "When Johnny-come-lately tries to put Johnny-on-the-spot, WHAT HAPPENS?," and went on to offer an allowance of four dollars, to be deducted from the price of a pen of the customer's choice, on any unsatisfactory fountain pen of any kind, purchased anywhere, provided its purchase price had been at least eight dollars. *Women's Wear Daily* published a report that "both stores were hoping the controversy could be extended because of its attendant publicity value." An armistice was reluctantly declared when Eversharp threatened to bring suit against both stores, claiming that the advertisements had damaged its trade reputation.

Shortly before Christmas of 1946, Reynolds put out a Rocket Threesome set, consisting of a Rocket and two new models, the Rockette and the Stubby Rocket. The set was priced at nine-ninety-five. It didn't sell well. One morning in the middle of February, 1947, Macy's startled the world by running a large advertisement offering, "for the first time anywhere," the Reynolds Rocket Threesome for two-seventy-nine, or the pens in it for ninety-eight cents apiece. Macy's, which had got the pens not from Reynolds but from a Chicago jobber who had got them from Reynolds, sold sixty thousand of them the first day. "What a blast!" a Macy's man said later. "It took Gimbel's a day to get back on their pins." Twenty-four hours after the Macy coup, Gimbel's advertised the Rocket Threesome at two-fifty-nine, or ninety-four cents per pen. "Or, if you prefer," Good Old Gimbel's added ominously, "we recommend the B 2 Ballero (made by Blythe), which we consider a far superior pen in the lower-priced pen field." The price war intensified during the day. "We were shopping Macy's every twenty minutes," a Gimbel's executive recalls. "The prices changed five times during shopping hours." Before the day was over, Gimbel's ran out of Threesome pens, which it had finally reduced to eighty-four cents, whereupon Macy's, which had knocked them down to eighty-eight cents, went back to ninety-eight cents. The next day, Gimbel's rallied by placing on sale three models—Junior, Senior, and Super Rockets—which Reynolds had just brought out, to sell at a dollar sixty-nine each, and charging eighty-eight cents for them. Reynolds heard about this and sadly said he might be obliged to sue his old friend Gimbel's for cutting the price of models that had only just gone on the market. Gimbel's restored the new Rockets to the price Reynolds had set.

Relations between Reynolds and Gimbel's were never the same after the mention of the B 2 Ballero. On February 16th, Gimbel's, proclaiming itself "the granddaddy of the ball-point pen business," publicly expressed the belief that "there is no bigger ball-point pen value than the Rolls by Continental," priced at ninety-eight cents.

IT was time to get himself in the public eye again, Reynolds decided. Calling in the press, he passed out pens to all hands and announced that he would shortly fly around the world with William P. Odom, a veteran of flying the Hump into China. Reynolds said he was out to break the record time of ninety-one hours and fourteen minutes, set by Howard Hughes in 1938. He said that he would act as navigator of the plane, an A-26 light attack bomber, which he had bought and converted for the flight and had christened the Reynolds Bombshell. After several delays, in the course of which Reynolds reduced from a hundred and ninety-one pounds to a hundred and sixty-one, so that he could squeeze through the narrow cabin door, he took off from LaGuardia Field on April 12th, seated facing backward in a makeshift jump seat, between the pilot and copilot, and gallantly flourishing a fistful of ball-point pens, all guaranteed not to leak at twenty thousand feet. Four days later, he was back at LaGuardia, having broken the Hughes record by twelve hours and nineteen

minutes, and having given away a thousand pens en route. The trip cost two hundred and fifty-five thousand dollars, and Reynolds thinks the publicity he received was worth every penny of it. "My press-clipping-service bill alone came to twenty thousand dollars," he says with satisfaction. Reynolds and Odom made a triumphal appearance at the White House, where Mr. Truman congratulated them on their achievement. "The President was very gracious," Reynolds says. "He said he had followed the flight all the way around on the radio. He told me a funny story about his grandmother and asked me how business was in general. I said I didn't know much about business in general but that I was doing all right."

The heroes returned to New York, where Reynolds, to the surprise of the pen world, put in an appearance not at Gimbel's but at Macy's, which celebrated the occasion by announcing the exclusive sale of a brand-new two-pointed Reynolds model—"The only pen that writes in red and blue! Actually, two pens in one!" The hydra-headed pen, which was priced at ninety-eight cents, was, naturally, named the Bombshell, and Reynolds, using one, freely dispensed autographs to the awed customers. Gimbel's took it very hard. "We had thought *we* were all set to break the Bombshell before Milton started off on the trip," a Gimbel's man says. "We even sent a box of K rations to him at the Gotham to take along with him. Then—think of it!—he brought the Bombshell out over *there*. And we'd already put a big ad in the *Times* congratulating him! Mr. Fred was very, very put out."

THE year 1947 was a lean one for ball-point-pen manufacturers. The public didn't respond properly to round-the-world flights, or two pens in one, or any of the numerous incantations with which Reynolds and the other manufacturers sought to stir it. Eversharp, which had finally paid more than a million dollars to buy out Eterpen's American rights in their entirety, lost over three million dollars that year. In an apologia to the firm's stockholders, Straus, who has since resigned its presidency, hinted that perhaps he and his colleagues had allowed themselves to become too deeply impressed by what had seemed an insatiable demand for ball-point pens. "Your management," he wrote, "expended so great a portion of its time and attention in solving the problems of the ball-point pen that certain developments of its conventional . . . business were, perhaps, underemphasized." One Eversharp official has since, in more succinct language, pointed out another difficulty that was besetting the trade then. "The monkeys took over," he said. "Predatory individuals on the tail of a fast item. People were parking their cars in the street and using their garages as ball-point-pen factories. Their pens, of course, were inferior."

Reynolds was having as many difficulties as the rest of them, but he refused to be downcast. His faith in airplane flights as a means of stimulating sales remained unflagging. In December of the year that Eversharp found so disappointing, he announced that he would lead a large expedition to China with the object of finding and measuring a mountain that was rumored to be higher than Mount Everest, in the Amne Machin Range, near the Chinese-Tibetan border. The expedition, he said, was to be undertaken with the coöperation of the Boston Museum of Science, the Army, the Air Force, Harvard, and the Academia Sinica, a Chinese-government scientific society, and would also explore the unmapped sources of the Yellow River. He had bought another plane, he continued—a C-87, which he had christened the Explorer—to fly the expedition over, and it was to be piloted by Odom. "On board," the *Times* reported, "besides Mr. Reynolds, pen manufacturer and sportsman, [will be] geologists, meteorologists, photographers, and physicists, as well as radar equipment, special height-measuring apparatus, cameras, thermometers, and a battery of delicate and precise barometers." The Chinese government agreed to let Reynolds make the flight, provided he took some Chinese scientists along with him. Interviewed in Nanking, Dr. Adam Pen-tung Sah, director general of the Academia Sinica, said the expedition would be welcome. He also remarked that Chinese geologists already had the sources of the Yellow River well in hand and had determined that the highest peak in the Amne Machin Range was no more than twenty thousand feet, approximately ten thousand feet less than Mount Everest. "Actually, it was *Life* magazine that put me up to it," Reynolds has since said. "They called me up and asked if I wanted to hunt for this highest mountain, which, by a coincidence, I had been reading up on. They said their science editor had been working on the problem for a whole year. I asked them why they didn't run their own expedition. They said they just printed the news, they didn't make it."

The expedition took off from Oakland, California, early in March, 1948, in a gratifying swirl of publicity. Before leaving, Reynolds had an audience with President Truman, received his best wishes for success, and, in return, assured him that he would do his utmost "to keep the United States in the lead of scientific research." He also arranged to have the President supplied with more pens. Upon arriving in China, Reynolds became involved in a series of differences with the Chinese, who demanded that a considerable—and, it seemed to Reynolds, unreasonable—number of their scientists accompany him on the trip. Between wrangles, Reynolds held press conferences. In Shanghai, wearing the uniform of a war correspondent, he received the press in the Hotel Cathay and displayed credentials from *Life*; in Peiping, in the Grand Hotel des Wagons-Lits, he appeared in a blue mandarin costume and handed out pens to Chinese reporters, some of whom sold them on the black market as soon as the conference was over. The Shanghai *Evening Post & Mercury*, growing impatient, suggested that the expedition hurry up with the job of finding the world's highest mountain, which it proposed with a sneer be named Mount Reynolds. Reynolds, who was planning to issue a special Explorer pen if he found the mountain, was delighted with the proposal and sent the editor a ball-point pen that glowed in the dark, and the editor's female assistant a ball-point perfume dispenser (a Reynolds sideline) that was guaranteed to exude scent for five years. The perfume was one called Trois Fleurs, and Reynolds smelled overpoweringly of it, for he also carried a number of the dispensers in his pockets and they, like the pens, had a tendency to leak.

Finally, Reynolds got things more or less straightened out with the Chinese, and the great day for the flight over the Amne Machin Range arrived. The Explorer, heavily loaded with American and Chinese scientists, its crew, and Reynolds, set off down a runway outside Peiping. Suddenly it tilted, its right propeller touched the ground, its nose wheel collapsed, and it gently settled into the mud of China. Nobody was hurt. "The expedition is over," Reynolds announced gravely as he surveyed the damage. "Captain Everest has won again."

Two days later, with a crew but without scientists, either American or Chinese, Reynolds and the Explorer landed at the Shanghai airport. He told Chinese reporters that his plane had been re-

paired at Peiping by mechanics of the Chinese Air Force and that he was leaving immediately for the United States, via Tokyo. Fourteen hours later, he landed again, without explanation, at the Shanghai airport. When word of this reached Dr. Bradford Washburn, director of the Boston Museum of Science, who had accompanied Reynolds to China as a member of the expedition and was still in Shanghai, he exclaimed, "Well, I'll curl up and die! He must have flown over the Amne Machin Range!" Reynolds denied this. "We were on our way to India," he said. "Then we realized we didn't have the necessary visas and came back."

In Nanking, Dr. Sah, who appeared to regard it as significant that the cruising speed of Reynolds' plane was two hundred miles an hour, or just about right to get from Shanghai to the Amne Machin Range and back in fourteen hours, charged Reynolds with a "deliberate violation of his agreement with the Chinese government" and said he would file a protest with the American Embassy. Accompanied by eight similarly distressed Academia Sinica colleagues, Dr. Sah then called on Reynolds, who had proceeded to Nanking. "We feel rather heavyhearted at what you have been doing since the accident at Peiping," Dr. Sah said. Reynolds, chain-smoking cigarettes in an amber holder, again denied having flown over the range but admitted "negligence" in having taken off without informing the scientists. Observing that his callers seemed unimpressed by his denial, he offered to set up a ball-point-pen factory in China, all profits to go to the New Life Movement Association, an organization devoted to the betterment of China. He glowingly referred to the Chinese Air Force as "one of the greatest little air forces in the world," and said he would gladly lead a new expedition of Chinese scientists to the Amne Machins.

The interview broke up inconclusively and Reynolds returned to Shanghai. There he found his plane, with Odom and the rest of the crew inside it, impounded, and guarded by Chinese armed with tommy guns. Reynolds' passport was taken away from him, and he was ordered to report to the local police station. He says he believed that he was about to be shot. He took emergency action. Strolling over to the guards, he casually suggested that they let him enter the plane to get them some ball-point pens. Permission was granted. Reynolds climbed into the plane and hurled out handfuls of gold-plated pens. Then, while the guards were scrambling for them, he slammed the door and told Odom to gun the engines, and the plane roared off down the runway for Tokyo. Including those he tossed out of the plane, Reynolds had given away ten thousand pens in China.

"I'm through with China. Now we are back in God's country," Reynolds told the press, between bites into a hot dog, upon his arrival at the Tokyo airport. After a pause, he added, "At least, Americans run it."

Reynolds flew back to the United States by easy stages, pursued by cries of "Impostor!" from the Chinese press. Dr. Sah wrote a letter to the New York *Times*, in which he called the expedition a failure and deplored the wasting of the energies of several Chinese geologists "at a time when they are carrying out such projects as the study of glaciation of the lower Yangtze." *Time*, without mentioning the role its sister publication had played in the fiasco, reviewed the affair in curt and liverish fashion. A member of the Associated Press staff in Shanghai flew back and forth over the Amne Machin Range in a radar-equipped plane and reported, "If there's a peak there higher than Everest we couldn't find it." The Moscow radio implied that Reynolds had actually been hunting for uranium on behalf of American imperialism.

Reynolds has since told friends, and various Lions Club luncheon groups, which hold him in high regard as a speaker, that he and the plane's crew did fly over the Amne Machin Range. "The mountain was there, all right," he has said. "It was covered with snow. A magnificent sight! We were flying at more than twenty-seven thousand feet and its peak disappeared into the clouds at thirty-one thousand feet." On other occasions, in a less exuberant mood, he has said of his venture into the Orient, "I lost face." A close friend of Reynolds' says that Reynolds once showed him some hazy motion pictures, taken in the air, of a tall mountain. "Unfortunately, there was no way of telling from the movie how high the mountain was," the friend adds. "You have to know Milt to appreciate the situation. He spent a lot of money to find a mountain higher than Everest, and I'm absolutely convinced he thinks he found one."

The expedition cost Reynolds two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, and he had almost nothing except lost face to show for it. Back in Chicago, he found little to cheer him. His newest pen, the Reynolds Flyer, was selling for a measly thirty-nine cents retail. The pen now cost about eight cents to manufacture, allowing Reynolds a margin of profit that he considered negligible. Accordingly, he called his staff together, remarked briskly that they had no tradition to carry on, and, except for retaining a few relatively minor foreign holdings, quietly went out of the pen business. Shortly thereafter, the Moscow radio announced that production of a ball-point pen would soon begin at the Sacco & Vanzetti Pencil Factory, in Moscow.

THE Reynolds International Pen Company still exists on paper, but as little more than a holding company. At one time, it owned ten foreign companies. Eight of these have been disposed of, on a basis that allows the Reynolds company a royalty on the pens manufactured. It still has a part interest in the two others—one in Canada, one in Mexico. The company derives an income from the ten that amounts, Reynolds says, to "no more than a few hundred thousand dollars a year."

The indoor tennis court has passed into other hands. Reynolds maintains a much smaller plant in Chicago, to make replacements for defective pens, which continue to be returned, and to keep himself supplied. He still hands out free pens, at the rate of about thirty a week, to bellboys, hotel clerks, people he meets at parties, and traffic cops who stop him for speeding. Hole-in-one and double-eagle golfers no longer receive free Reynolds pens, however, and the Reynolds Master Bowlers Association is similarly dissolved. Reynolds' headquarters are once more the small but comfortable offices of the Printasign Company. "Printasign just runs along like Tennyson's brook," a Reynolds deputy says. As the price of ball-point pens went down, the price of Printasign machines went up. When Reynolds acquired the rights to the sign-printing machine, it sold for nine hundred dollars, and buyers were few. Extensively improved, it now sells for slightly less than four thousand dollars, and Reynolds says he can't keep up with the demand.

Reynolds lives with his wife, the former Edna Loebe, whom he married in 1916, in a four-room suite in the Windermere Hotel, off Chicago's South Shore Drive, surrounded by Napoleonic chairs and prints and twenty-six thick books of selected press clippings, handsomely bound. He keeps an apartment in a country club near Mexico City, which he visits fairly frequently, and he owns a seventeenth-century château near Versailles, which he seldom visits at

all. He picked up the château in 1947. "They told me it was a steal," he says. "It has *two* moats—gee!—gardens, statuary, and everything. It couldn't be replaced for millions. I turned the stables into a ball-point-pen assembly plant."

Now fifty-nine, Reynolds still likes to travel. Late in 1949, he tried to beat the record for a round-the-world flight on scheduled airlines, a record held then, as now, by Colonel Edward Eagan, chairman of the New York State Athletic Commission. Flying eastward from Los Angeles, Reynolds crossed Europe and passed through Damascus, Karachi, Delhi, Calcutta, Bangkok, Hong Kong, Manila, Guam, and Midway on schedule, but he missed a connection at Honolulu and gave up the attempt, saying dispiritedly, "I'll never try again." He recently turned up here at the Gotham Hotel with tentative plans for a new, and noncommercial, expedition to India. The project calls for him to snare, kill, and embalm Indian monkeys and ship the remains back to the United States for anthropological-research purposes. "I may shoot tigers with the Maharajah of Bundi," he told an acquaintance who called on him at the hotel. "A great guy, the Maharajah." Reynolds absent-mindedly rummaged in a suitcase and handed his visitor five Reynolds ball-point pens—one that wrote in purple, one that wrote in blue and red, one that wrote in green, blue, red, and purple, one that glowed in the dark, and one, rather dusty, that bore the inscription "I Swiped This from Major General Harry H. Vaughan."

—THOMAS WHITESIDE

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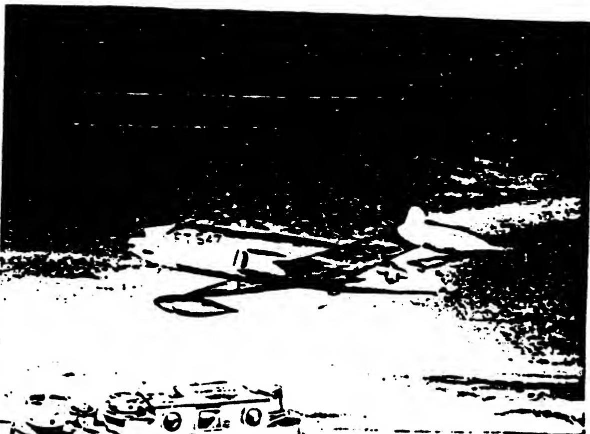

Wild Blue Yonder... Leica color photo by jet pilot Lt. Wm. R. Fullerton, USAF, taken 20,000 feet up at f/6.3, 1/100, going 500 mph.

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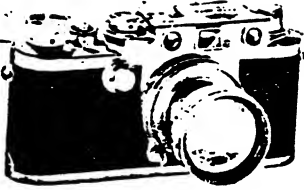

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